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Seasonable Advice, *Not to forsake the Public Assemblies for Religious Worship.*

I N A
S E R M O N
Preach'd at
BLACK-FRYARS,
T O A
S O C I E T Y
O F
Y O U N G M E N,
January 1, 1714.

By S. W R I G H T.

Isa. II. 3. *And many People shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his Ways, and we will walk in his Paths.*

Pfal. XCV. 6. *O come let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

L O N D O N :

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THE PREFACE.

THE chief Design of a Yearly Sermon at the Time and Place mention'd in the Title, is, to encourage the Piety of a Set of Persons, who have laid themselves under particular Obligations to attend to Matters of a Religious Nature. Such as, the daily Reading the Holy Scriptures ; diligent Attendance on the Public Worship of God on the Lord's Day ; with other things, which, if God permit, may hereafter be insisted on.

I have formerly recommended to Such, a taking heed to their Ways according to God's Word. Next to which, I would now recommend a Constant, Reverent, and Careful Attendance on the Ordinances and Solemnities of the Christian Worship, in our stated Assemblies.

I would be so far from appearing anxious to do something Extraordinary on these Occasions, that I would perfectly give up my self to all the Plainness and Familiarity, with which we are us'd to converse, weekly, together.

The following Discourse is intended not only as an Excitement to the public Worship of God in general ; but as a short Directory in our

The PREFACE.

joining with that Way, and those several Parts of Worship, now in use, among the Moderate Dissenters.

Those who have learn'd, of late, to speak against the Worship of the whole Body of the Dissenters, as confus'd and disorderly, may, from hence, if they please, observe their Conformity to the Worship of the Primitive Christians; so that if they forbear those gross Misrepresentations of us, which some have run into, they must despise their Assemblies and ours together.

However, if we are still to be born down by Misrepresentations, and an Irreligious or Jealous Spirit; whilst Men will not acquaint themselves with us; or if they do, set themselves against that Seriousness and Regular Piety they see among us; we have the less Reason to be affected with their Reproaches, and contemptuous Carriage.

And whatever some Men of more Heat than Light; or others of more Learning than Religion, may say of Us and our Assemblies; I trust, we shall be found at last of that General Assembly and Church of the First-born, which are written in Heaven; and when we appear before God the Judge of all, shall have Mansions appointed us with the Spirits of just Men made perfect.

A
 S E R M O N
 Preach'd to a
 S O C I E T Y
 O F
 Young Men, &c.

H E B. X. 25. former Part.

Not forsaking the Assembling of your selves together, as the manner of some is——

ON E great Design of this *Epistle*, is to commend the *Christian Religion*, by comparing it with, and shewing how far it transcends, the *Jewish*. An Attempt, in which the Author is so successful, that, whilst he makes the *Old Testament* Revelation of the Mind and Will of God the most awful and excellent that ever was in the World, before our Saviour; he yet makes the *New Testament* Dispensation every way out-shine and exceed it. The one was given by Angels and Servants; the other by the Son of God himself. Who, in his Divine Nature, is prov'd to be far above the Angels; since they are *all* said to *worship Him*: And in his human Nature

Nature he is described, as far exalted above his Fellows; becoming a greater Prophet than *Moses*, a greater Priest than *Aaron*, and a greater King than *Melchizedeck*. So that from hence, the *Jewish* Religion appears to have been instituted only to *subserve* the Christian: All its Sacrifices and Institutions being so contriv'd, as to prefigure and prepare Men for a more spiritual and heavenly State of Things.

No wonder therefore the *Apostle* argues so warmly against *Apostatizing to Judaism*; and calls upon those who had embraced Christianity to adhere to their Profession, whatever Temptations or Sufferings might lie before them. Let any Man read the former part of this Epistle, with that Seriousness and Attention, so great and well contriv'd a Performance requires, and he must stand convinced that never was a surer, or better Foundation laid, than is there, for such Admonitions as these: *Let us hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering. Let us consider one another to provoke unto Love, and to good Works: not forsaking the assembling of our selves together.*

Now if the Christian Faith and Worship was not to be deserted on pretence of returning to the *Jews*; much less should any draw back to Atheism, and Immorality. It will also follow from hence, that to forsake a more spiritual Service, to fall in with a less perfect and ceremonious one, is a very great Evil. The Purity of the Gospel Institutions, every Christian is, now, as much as ever, obliged to assert. And if Ceremonies of God's Appointment (as the *Jewish* were) must be renounced, one would think it should not be once called in question, whether the Inventions and Impositions of Men are to be renounced or not: Except the Authority of a Magistrate was prov'd equal to that of a Person
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certainly inspir'd and sent by God. Or that Christ had committed a Power to the ordinary and uninspir'd Governors of his Church, to make Canons, that should be as necessary and binding, as his own Laws, or those of his Apostles.

But as it might not be proper, so I perswade myself it is not needful I should pursue this Argument at present : I shall rather choose to enlarge a little on the following General Heads.

I. Shew what kind of Assemblies these were, concerning which our Text speaks. II. Consider what Obligations Christians were under to keep up such Assemblies. III. Enquire on what Accounts some are said to forsake these Assemblies. IV. Apply these things to our present Circumstances.

I. I would briefly *explain the Nature of those Assemblies*, concerning which, the *Apostle* is here speaking. And without doubt they were,

(I.) *Religious Assemblies*. Not called together with any political Views to injure or alter the Kingdoms of this World ; much less to serve any of those mean and base Purposes, which those, who were ignorant of 'em, and Enemies to 'em, maliciously suggested. But to worship their God, to commemorate their Redeemer, to obtain and exercise the Gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit, and by the most solemn Vows and Exhortations to engage themselves, and one another, to every good Work.

Of these Assemblies there were two sorts, such as were *private*, of their own arbitrary Appointment: and such as were *publick*, settled by Divine Authority. Their private Meetings were most frequent, according to antient Writers, on *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*. The one being the Day on which Christ was betrayed ; the other the Day on which

he

he was crucify'd. But we are more generally told, that on *any* Day, when their common Labour and Business was over, they would spend the Evening in Religious Exercises. And the *Scripture* speaks of

such as *continued* daily, with one
 Acts ii. 46. *accord in the Temple, and breaking Bread*
 Heb. iii. 13. *from House to House; as also of exhort-*
ing one another daily. However this

was, their more publick and stated Assemblies were gather'd together but once a Week. These, a Divine Appointment had made it an indispensable Duty to join with, in the several Parts of Religious Worship. And such Conscience did the first Christians generally make of appearing in these Assemblies, that nothing but Sicknefs, or absolute Necessity could make them absent themselves.

Mr. Baxter, in his *Paraphrase*, has made the Words I am upon take in both. For thus he explains them; "Not forsaking the more full Church
 " Assemblies, or any Christian Converse and
 " Communion, by which you may excite and edi-
 " fy one another. Those of us who are us'd to meet on other Days, as well as Lord's Days, will be very well pleas'd, I doubt not, to extend the Import of this Admonition so far; and to apply the *exhorting one another*, here spoke of, to such private Occasions. But we must take care, at the same time, chiefly to fix our Thoughts on what is principally here intended *, the more *publick assembling* our selves with the *Multitude of them that keep Holy Day*. Taking this also along with us.

(2.) That they were *Orderly Assemblies*, which the Apostle here speaks of, as well as Religious

* In Græco est incompositum vocabulum ἐπισημαστικὸν quod Erasmus translulit Aggregationem.

ones: not called together by such as were full of Pride and self-Conceit; or, in the Phrase of the Author just mention'd, such as had got a *Talkative Disease*: But they were Assemblies under the Direction of Persons duly commission'd, and ordained publickly to exhort and teach Men.

The several parts of Worship, in which they statedly engaged, are expressly recorded in the Scripture: and from these we may infer their Order. Of these we have a Summary in *Acts ii. 42.* *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine, and in Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in Prayer.* And St. Paul afterwards writing to the Church of *Corinth*, mentions also their having a *Psalm*, and *Interpretations* of the *1 Cor. xiv. 20.* Word of God. And tho' at the same time there were some endowed with *extraordinary Gifts*; yet he requires that the Exercise of these should not break in upon the Order of their Worship, or confusedly interfere with one another; but strictly requires, that *all things be done decently, and in order.*

In the Ages immediately succeeding that of the *Apostles*, we have very particular Accounts of their reading the Scriptures, Preaching, Praying, Singing, and Administration of the Sacraments in their publick Assemblies. If we would know what Scriptures were read, one of the *first Apologists* tells us, that *they read the Writings, both of the Prophets and the Apostles.* If we ask what *Psalms* were sung, we find sometimes those of *David* mention'd; and at other times *Psalms* composed for the Honour of Christ Jesus: Of which *Eusebius* speaks in several Places of his *History*. If we enquire what *Prayers* they presented, we are told, that the *Lord's Prayer* was commonly used by them; but not always: and that other Prayers were offered up unto God, ac-

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cording

cording to the Variety of Circumstances and Conditions : *Tertullian* argues for this very largely. If we ask what kind of *Sermons* were preach'd ; we may judge from those that are extant, that they were generally no more than Expositions of the Scriptures that had been read ; tho' at some times we meet also with Exhortations to some particular Grace or Virtue ; and Dehortations from particular Vices.

And then also the Administration of the *Sacraments* were Parts of the publick Worship : *Baptism* being very frequently, and the *Lord's Supper* stately celebrated in their Weekly Assemblies. This is plainly intimated in the *Acts* of the *Apostles*, and more expressly declar'd by other Writers ; * *Justin Martyr* says, that *after they had read, preach'd, and pray'd, then they proceeded to the Administration of the Eucharist*. And these were the Assemblies, from which our Text forbids Men to withdraw themselves. To enforce which Prohibition,

II. Let us consider what *Obligations* Christians were under to *keep up* such Assemblies. And we shall find those *Obligations* were too great to be set aside, if we carefully attend to such things as these.

(1.) They were obliged by the *Moral Law* to consecrate a *seventh part* of their time, to the Worship

* I had marked out several Passages in my late Course of Reading, which I should have transcribed, if the second Part of the Enquiry into the Constitution, and Worship of the Primitive Church, had not render'd it needless. Which being lately reprinted, I presume will be more generably look'd into. In which the most considerable Passages of antient Worship, that relate to any of the Particulars I have mention'd, are explain'd and laid together.

and Service of God. By *Moral* is meant that which is reasonable and fit to be done, altho' there was no express Command to enforce it; and which is therefore a never ceasing Law; equally binding to all Persons, throughout all Ages. In this Sense the Morality of the *Fourth Commandment* is evident. For as Reason tells us, if God is to be worshipped, there must be a set time for it; so also upon the very first mention of God's allowing *six Days for our own Work and Labour*, it appears the most reasonable thing in the World, that the *Seventh* should be devoted to his more immediate Service. And tho' perhaps this had not been so easily found out, or so universally agreed upon, without Revelation; yet no sooner is it suggested to us, but it appears exceedingly fit and becoming: insomuch that the Reason of Mankind cannot but give into it in such a manner, as to make it a Law unto themselves. Thus much is evident from the very Arguments of those that oppose the Morality of the Sabbath: Since they do acknowledge it is fit to be made a Law by all Civil Powers; whilst they say it has not the Force of a standing Law of God. What is allowed to be universally suitable to the Reason of Mankind, and for their Good, is a Law of God, whether it had been written or not *.

The Reason, 'tis true, which *Moses* alledges for the *Jews*, observing a Sabbath, is not now, the first and chief Reason of the Christians observing one. The Commemoration of the Work of our Redemption has taken place of that of our Creation: And the Day in which our Redeemer rose

* Ratio profecta à rerum natura non hinc denique incipit Lex esse cum scripta est, sed tum cum orta. Orta autem simul est cum mente Divina. Cicero.

X It would not have been found out^{B²} from at all, for it would not have been without, Revelation & divine appointment.

It would not appear to plain light & Reason, with a Divine Revelation, & 7th Part of Time was fit & reasonable to be observed, for it worship & service of God. We are beholden to Divine Revelation entirely for this.

from the Dead is kept holy ; instead of that, where-
in the Creator rested after his Formation of the
World. But altho' in the first Writing of the
Fourth Command, the Circumstance of time was
affixed so, as to become alterable ; yet the Substance
of the Command remains unalterable, and will
continue in full Force to the End of the World.

Christ *the Son of Man*, is said to be *Lord of the Sabbath* ; as having not only a Power to dispense
with the ceremonial Observance of it, according to
some Customs of the *Jews* ; but also to alter the time
of it : that is, still reserving one Day in seven to
be spent in publick and private Exercises of Devotion,
and in the Service of God. So that as the
Jews were obliged to assemble themselves together
on their Sabbath, to join in the Observance of the
Mosaic Institutions ; Christians were also obliged
to assemble themselves in the like publick manner,
on the Day Christ had chosen to join in the Observance
of his Ordinances and Institutions. From
hence I would therefore take occasion to add,

(2.) This was further made a Duty by our Saviour's
owning such Assemblies with his special Presence
and Blessing. That very first Day of the Week in
which Christ rose from the Dead, he join'd himself
to the *two Disciples* that were walking to *Emmaus*,
expounding to 'em the Scriptures ; and at last
making himself known in the breaking of Bread. This
was, I say, on the Resurrection Day ; for so these
Disciples, in their speaking of the condemning and
crucifying of Christ, immediately add, *To Day is
the third Day, since these things were done.*

Afterward he appear'd likewise, on this first Day
of the Week, to his *Apostles*, when they were gathered
together ; and blest them with that so
lately bequeathed Blessing, *Peace be unto you.* He
now corrects their Errors ; removes their Fears,
shews

shews them his Hands and his Feet ; and makes himself known to them in such a manner, as fill'd them with Joy and Wonder.

And in *Eight Days* after this, when the Day of the Week on which he rose, return'd again, he came, and *stood in the midst of the Disciples*, as before, and repeated his former Blessing. He now also in a particular manner indulges the Weakness of *Thomas*, who till this time remain'd an Unbeliever ; allowing him to put his *Finger into the Print of the Nails*, and to *thrust his Hand into his Side*. But withal reproving him for his Want of Faith, and pronouncing those *blessed*, that should prove more ready Believers.

From hence the Apostles might judge they had sufficient Encouragement ; tho' besides this, I believe they had special Commandment and Direction, for the future, to assemble on *this Day*. And when they afterwards acted and spoke under the extraordinary Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it became a settled Point with them, to meet together for the Performance of all Parts of the Christian Worship, on the Day of Christ's Resurrection, *Acts xx. 7. Upon the First Day of the Week, when the Disciples came together to break Bread, Paul preached unto them.* And hence in the *1 Revel. 10.* this is called the *LORD's DAY*. A Name, that I wonder Christians don't much rather choose to make use of, than either the Heathenish Name of *Sunday*, or the Jewish of *Sabbath*.

(3.) The keeping up of stated Assemblies for Religious Worship was *necessary to maintain the Christian Faith*, and to *promote Christian Piety and Love*. If there had been no such publick Assemblies, there had been no proper Way of conveying the Articles of the Christian Faith from one Generation to another ; or however, no sufficient Security that they
were

were kept pure and entire. The Scriptures would have been little regarded, and no doubt greatly corrupted, if they had lain only in private Hands: But when these Sacred Records were committed to Societies and Bodies of Men in the several Quarters of the World; when they were weekly read, and explain'd; and when by publick and solemn Actions the most important and considerable things were visibly represented; here was enough both to maintain, and propagate this Faith in the World.

Again, if there had been no Assemblies for Christians to meet together, as we have described, they had wanted many useful Instructions in Matters of *Practical Religion*; they had wanted also those warm Exhortations and frequent Remembrancers, that were needful to excite and quicken them in the way of their Duty, and to encourage their Perseverance.

It is also exceedingly apparent, that *Love* and *Charity* must die away, if it was not reinforced by such Associations as these. The publick Ordinances and Institutions of the Gospel are such as constrain Men to Love one another. God and Christ's forgiving and manifesting such amazing Grace and Love to poor Sinners; and the Spirit of Love breathing upon and filling these Assemblies, must certainly overcome all their little Distastes, and Differences among themselves. The uniting Principles, Motives, and Prospects, which the Gospel lays before Men, could not be attended to, in their Worshipping together, as they ought to be, without a great deal of Love and Charity. But upon Mens forsaking the publick Assemblies, they soon grow estranged; and soon after that prejudic'd against one another. More ready to offend, but more hard to forgive; and so they become continual Exercises and Enemies to each other.

All these things the *Apostle* plainly leads us to argue from, in the Context. In the *two Verses* preceding that I am upon, he calls upon the believing *Hebrews* to hold fast the Profession of their Faith; and then to provoke one another to Love and to Good Works; upon which he immediately subjoins, *not forsaking the assembling of your selves together*: Which plainly implies, that in this way they might promise themselves Establishment in the Faith, and Improvement in Love and Good Works; but if they deserted these Assemblies, that it would be quite otherwise.

Thus in fact it has always been. Those who have most conscientiously adher'd to the publick Worship and Ordinances of the Gospel, have been most eminent for their Faith, Piety and Love: Whilst those, who have turn'd away from these, have fall'n into all manner of Errors, Vices, and Mischiefs.

The observing or disregarding the Fourth Commandment has a mighty Influence as to all the rest; and on this account may very well have a REMEMBER set before it; which no other Commandment has, to introduce it. But now to prevent our breaking through all these Obligations, as some spoken of in our Text did, I shall for your Warning,

III. Enquire on what accounts Men might then be led to forsake the Publick Assemblies. And as far as the same Evils may at any time endanger our standing, they ought to be carefully avoided and watch'd against.

I. There seems to have been, amongst some of these first Christians, a prevailing Sloth and Security, through a Disregard to the Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel. The Day of Christ's coming, to destroy those

those that disobey'd and despis'd him, and to reward those that faithfully worship'd and served him, was not enough thought on, or believed, to give Weight and Efficacy to his Ordinances and Institutions. Thus much is plainly intimated by the *Apostle's* calling upon them to stir up themselves, and consider the *Signs and Evidences* they had of *such a Day approaching*. The View of which could not but provoke 'em to shake off a lazy Indifference, and base Sluggishness of Temper, and excite an Emulation, of exceeding one another, in Love and Good Works.

A Description of that Servant, who says in his unbelieving Heart, the *Lord delays his Coming*, you may read in the xxiv. *Matth.* latter End. He is one that falls into all manner of Disorders, both in the Conduct of himself, and the Usage of his Fellow-Servants.

When Men lose a serious Apprehension of the Certainty, Awfulness and Nearness of a Future Judgment, it is not to be expected, that either their Hopes or their Fears of any thing else, should be powerful enough to keep up a just and lasting Attention to the Exercises of Religion.

(2.) Some might prove Deserters through *Spiritual Pride*; thinking themselves so much better than others, that they were above the common and ordinary Ways of Worship. *Calvin* charges the Separation from the Assemblies here spoke of, to such a Conceit as this *, without so much as mentioning any other Occasion of it. From hence arguing, that we have no Reason to be disturbed or per-

* Hinc apparet, primam schismatum omnium originem hanc fuisse, quod superbi homines cum aliorum contemptu sibi plus jussu placuerint. *Comment. Tom. 7. Amst. p. 566.*

plexed about it, if Men should act thus in our Days, when even the Apostolical Age was not free from such unruly Persons *. Some I know there are, who pretend to take shelter under this venerable Name, in all their Pretences to a greater Spirituality than others; and for their sakes I therefore thought it most proper to insist on his Judgment and Censure.

We find this Sin of *Spiritual Pride* frequently caution'd against in Scripture, as a most dangerous, and destructive Evil. St. Paul tells his *Corinthians*, that if *any Man think he knoweth any thing*, i. e. so as to be proud and conceited of it, *He knoweth nothing as he ought to know*, 1 Cor. viii. 2. And the Apostle *James* requires that Men should be *swift to hear, slow to speak*; that they should *receive the Word with Meekness*, Jam. i. 19, &c. and that they should always act as those that consider; *God resisteth the Proud, but giveth Grace to the Humble*, James iv. 6. We have two Instances of this mighty Pretence to Spirituality, which it is foretold would lead some Men from the Faith, 1 Tim. iv. 3. And there is nothing which more plainly tends to the breaking in upon all the Order and Comfort of our Religious Assemblies, or the breaking off from them, than this Temper of Mind. But there is another kind of Pride, which some Men are more in danger of being led by, than this; to which, very likely, the Delinquency of such as are pointed at in our Text, may in a great measure be charg'd. For,

* Sed quum audimus jam à seculo Apostolorum fuisse perfidos Homines qui ab Ecclesia discederent: minus percellit nos ac turbari convenit similibus Defectionum exemplis quæ hodie cernere licet. Ibid.

3. *Worldly Pride*, as well as *Spiritual*, *might lead Men to forsake the Christian Assemblies*. This, *Eftius* thinks most fit to be insisted on : That some Persons of morose, and disdainful Tempers, who were a little better provided for in the World than others, thought it a Disgrace to 'em to appear with a Company of mean and poor People, as the Christians generally then were †. And he refers us to *James ii. ver. 2, 3.* as an undoubted Proof of the Prevalency of this Evil amongst the first Christians.

Too great a Distinction was made betwixt the Rich and Poor. And those who thought themselves not enough distinguish'd, withdrew from them. Some might begin to think there was not outward Pomp and Grandeur enough in the plain Institutions and Worship of the Gospel, and so desert Christianity it self. Others might possibly think it their Duty to maintain their Profession, but yet grew shy of appearing with the common sort of Christians in so doing. And indeed so many are the Inconveniencies, or pretended Indecencies that a worldly Pride will find out ; so many Contentions about Preheminence, and so much censuring and despising others ; and withal so much Impatience of every thing that is thought disagreeable ; 'tis not to be expected such Persons should keep to, or be pleased with any Assemblies long : and least of all with those that are made up of the Poor, and despised.

4. It is probable that some forsook the Assemblies, thro' *Fear of Trouble and Persecution*. And as

† — Vel potius ad homines morosos & fastuosos, præsertim Divites, qui cum fratribus humilioris conditionis, ut erant inter Christianos multi, congregari dedignabantur, &c.
this

this whole Epistle was writ to establish the believing *Hebrews* in the Profession of Christianity; and to arm them against all Trials and Sufferings they might be call'd to go through: So the Passage I am now considering may particularly refer to the approaching of such Evils and Calamities. In the Apprehension of which, instead of cowardly and distrustfully withdrawing from the Places of publick Worship; they should have been engaged to frequent them the *more*, for the mutual Encouragement and Establishment of each other. *Chrysostom* connecting the Words of our Text with those in the 22d Verse, *Let us draw near with a true Heart*, cries out *, *Wo to the fearful Heart, and to the Hands that grow feeble and remiss*. Those who on this Account forsake the assembling of themselves together, plainly prove that they are *such as have no Root in themselves*, and therefore when Tribulation or Persecution ariseth, because of the Word, they are offended, Matth. xiii. 21. Thus our Saviour himself foretold it would it be, and thus in all Ages it has been.

Let us take care that none of these things move us; but the more we see and hear of their prevailing upon *others*, the more let us watch and pray against them: And if by this means we hold fast our Integrity till we die, happy are we. But I shall reserve the farther urging of this, for the Close of this Discourse: To which I shall now hasten,

IV. By *applying* what has been said to our own Conduct and Behaviour.

* *ὡαὶ γὰρ καρδία δειλὴ καὶ χερσὶ παρειμῆται.* Hom. xix. in Epist. ad Hebræos.

1. We should be engaged *not to absent* our selves from the *publick Assemblies* on any of the *stated and set times*, in which they are gather'd together. To come only now and then, as some extraordinary Occasion invites, or obliges Men; or to join in the publick Worship one part of the Day, whilst the other is neglected; is to be guilty of a very Criminal, tho' not a total forsaking of the assembling ourselves together. Some through Idleness in the Morning lose the first part of the Lord's Day; others by Entertainments or Company in the Afternoons, lose the latter part of it. And many through Profaneness, and an utter Contempt of the Gospel-Ordinances, lose the whole of it; spending the Day in journeying, or visiting, in Business or Diversion. Some People think it a sufficient Reason to vindicate the frequent absenting themselves from the Church, that they are not *well enough* to go thither; tho' they can go much further, and thro' more Inconveniencies, to follow their Business or their Pleasures in the World. Sometimes the Badness of the Weather is a Pretence for staying at home; which at one season of the Year is too hot, at another too cold, and frequently wet and stormy; and a Multitude of little trifling Excuses People frame to themselves, which, as they are hearken'd to, grow more and more powerful, till the Heart is quite estranged to the publick Worship, and to all Societies of Christians; and so at last they are quite abandon'd, and forsaken. Some choose to spend their time in the Fields, in conversing with Brutes and inanimate Creatures there; instead of conversing with God, and with the Worshipers of him. Others choose to spend their time with Companions worse than Brutes, in the vilest Conversations, and the vilest of Actions.

But

But I speak not this to accuse you; 'tis only designed to warn you of such Evils as these; that as they *do* not, so they *may* not prevail upon you. The Obligations to keep up Christian Assemblies, and to frequent them, are as great as ever. And I hope you are sensible that you stand as much in need of these Helps and Advantages as others have done. Yea many of you, by a voluntary Subscription, have engaged your selves to be *very diligent in attending the publick Worship, and very careful in observing the Lord's Day.* So that a Constancy and Care, which shall render you *exemplary*, may justly be expected from you, in this Particular. Let not the Enmity which the present Age discovers to all regular Piety and Religion, be a Discouragement to you; but rather an Excitement to greater Stedfastness and Zeal in your frequenting the House of God.

And since there are some other Occasions of meeting together for Religious Worship, besides those which are fix'd and determin'd by the Command of God; such, I mean, as the Practice of good People, and the Custom of all the Churches of God, as well as the Reason of the Things themselves, have made requisite to be observed; I would take this Opportunity to bespeak your serious Regard to these: namely, Days of *publick Fasting* and Humiliation, Days of *Thanksgiving* also, and Commemoration of extraordinary Mercies and Deliverances, together with our *Preparation Days for Sacramental Solemnities.* I wish that none would forsake or make light of these Opportunities of joining with the publick Assemblies.

2. From what has been said, we should be engaged *not to absent our selves from any part of the Christian Worship.* As we should not neglect any appointed *Time* of appearing before God, so we should
not

not neglect any appointed *Duty* in his Service. You have heard that the Assemblies, the *Apostle* here requires Men not to forsake, were *orderly* Assemblies, and such *should* ours be: Such, I may venture to say, according to the foregoing Account, ours are.

“ We first address Almighty God for his Grace
 “ and Assistance; then we read his Word; and
 “ after that follows Prayer, Preaching, Singing,
 “ and the frequent Administration of the Sacra-
 “ ments. All which must be attended to, if we
 “ would have our Worship compleat. We should
 always endeavour to be present at the first Begin-
 ning, and to bear a part to the Conclusion of the
 publick Solemnities.

When the *first Petitions* are offer'd up to God for his Grace and Assistance, at our *Entrance* upon Divine Service, we should be there ready to join in with them. This has been thought so necessary a part of Worship, that you see many Persons, especially those who have been instructed in the Way of the *Church of England*, let 'em come never so late into a publick Assembly, first put up a *secret* and *mental* Prayer to God, to be with them, before they join with the Congregation: And, tho' I cannot but think they act upon a Mistake, to imagine, that falling upon their Knees, or covering their Faces for a little time, whilst they offer up a short Prayer to God, in the middle of the publick Worship, will serve instead of doing this before, and at the Beginning of the Service: And, tho' it seems also very unsuitable to that Decency and Uniformity, which is pretended, for *one* to be praying whilst *others* are singing, or reading, or otherwise employ'd; yet thus much I think may fairly be argued from this Custom, that we ought to look up to God for his Spirit and Blessing, upon the Services before us, in order to our engaging in them. And there-

therefore Persons ought to be present at that time, when the *first Prayer* is offer'd, to this Effect.

Again, the *Reading of the Scriptures* should be constantly attended to. For this, no doubt, is a part of the publick Worship, however neglected by some Congregations amongst us. The *Law* and the *Prophets* were read in the *Jewish Synagogues* every *Sabbath Day*, Acts xiii. 27. And our Saviour himself first stood up to read, as the manner of the *Jews* was, and then proceeded afterwards to preach to them, Luke iv. 16. This was undoubtedly the Custom of the *first Christians*; and has generally been kept up to this Day. The *Church of England*, besides their two *Lessons*, have a Number of *Psalms*, and their Portions of Scripture, which are called the *Epistles* and *Gospels*, that are read in their Assemblies every Lord's Day. And I am sure we have no reason to dissent from 'em in the Use of the *Bible*, tho' we may refuse the Use of *another Book*, which is set upon a Level with this. 'Tis true, you may read your Bibles at home; Thanks be to God we can do so, and I wish all Men did so; but may you not also read many excellent Sermons, that have been publish'd for this End? And at this rate of talking, may not every part of publick Worship be neglected? Because the Word of God is written for *private Instruction*, must it not therefore be read, and preach'd for *publick Instruction* and Benefit? Have you the same *Influences* of the blessed Spirit to depend upon in private, that you have in publick Duties? Or do we find the *Effects* equally powerful and considerable? Or may we not yet say, that God loves the *Gates of Zion* more than all the *Dwellings* of Jacob? It is a Promise made to the Christian Assemblies, that, *where-ever they are gather'd together, in a Redeemer's Name, he will be, in a more peculiar manner, in the midst of them, and will bless them.*

Again,

Again, when the Assembly engages in *longer and more continued Prayer* to God, than at first; we should take care not only to worship with our Bodies, but to see that our Hearts do not forsake the Place and Work, in which we seem to be present. And certainly whatever may serve to engage our Reverence and Attention, is here to be pleaded for. The very Postures of our Bodies, *Kneeling* or *Standing*, should not be neglected by us; nor should we forsake a Custom, which all pious and serious Persons, by their own Practice, have recommended to us. It is a shame to see Persons sitting in our Religious Assemblies at the time of Prayer, excepting very great Weakness and Infirmary requires it. And it is yet a greater Indecency to see Men bowing to one another, and passing unseasonable Compliments at a time when every Eye should be lift up to God, and every Thought fix'd upon him. The *Primitive Christians* are represented as *looking up* with greatest Intensity toward Heaven all the time of their Prayers; or else as *closing* their Eyes, that they might not be diverted by any external Objects.

But, whatever Care we have not to forsake any pious, and commendable Customs as to our *outward* Behaviour, 'tis certain we ought especially to watch our *Hearts and Spirits*, that they do not withdraw from any *Branch* of Prayer. An inward Awe of the Divine Majesty should accompany our Invocations; great Humility and Contrition, our Confessions; a prevailing Faith and Earnestness, our Petitions; more especially when we pray for spiritual Mercies: In our Thanksgivings the tenderest Sense of Gratitude should possess our Souls: And the very Conclusion of Prayer should be pronounced with Composedness and Deliberation; not with a hurrying or customary Inconsiderateness, but

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so as that we may be able to *add*, an understanding, and serious *Amen*.

Further, in our *bearing Sermons*, we should take care that our Minds be not absent thro' Sloth or Distractions. For my own part, I had rather at any time see a Person go out of an Assembly, than *set himself* to sleep in it: Let him rather forsake it by his bodily Presence, than sit there to loose all Thought, and to discourage all about him. And as to those whose Hearts are running after their Covetousness and worldly Concerns; or after Pleasures and Trifles; what is this but to forsake the Assemblies, whilst they would be thought attending them? Where there is a Religious Care and Concern to prepare Sermons, I am sure there ought to be a serious and suitable Attention to 'em. But I have no Reason to reproach this Assembly, with the Want of this: It is with Pleasure that I have heard Strangers take notice of the serious Attention, and the decent Appearance of our stated Audience. And I wish the same might always be observed of those who come occasionally among us.

But to proceed, The *Singing of Psalms* is a Branch of Worship, that should not be neglected by us. All who are capable of bearing a part, should lift up their Voices with the Assembly, and not content themselves to sit silent, and as Hearers only in this Exercise. It was not intended meerly to engage Masters of Musick, but for every Christian to make Melody in his Heart to the Lord. And as in this Place of Worship it is thought most proper (undoubtedly it is most antient) to sing without *reading the Psalm audibly, Line by Line*; so none who are acquainted with our Custom, should satisfy themselves statedly to attend without providing Books, whereby they may be able to join in this Service.

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There is one thing more, which it may be proper distinctly to mention to you, and that is, *not to forsake the Assembly* till the *Benediction* be pronounced, with which our stated Worship is shut up. Some there are, who neither come at first to beg God's Blessing on them, nor stay at last to receive it; but rudely make their Advances in the middle of Divine Service, and as rudely rush away before the End of it: As if pronouncing the Blessing was only a Form of Words for dismissing an Assembly, and not a part of their Worship. Whereas a true Spirit of Devotion would teach Men timely to make their Approaches to God, and patiently to wait till they had received the Blessing from him. That Apostolical Benediction, which is commonly used among us, [*The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father, and the Communion and Fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you*] if seriously consider'd and understood, is certainly what every Person would desire to carry away with him.

Finally, As to the *Administration of the Sacraments*; I wish that *Baptism* was more frequently made a part of *publick Worship*, than at present it is. However sometimes we have it administred in our Assembly: And I hope Persons will more and more be convinced of the Reasonableness and Fitness of its being so.

I heartily wish also that those who think it their Duty to attend all the other Parts of Worship, might become sensible of the Evil, of turning away from the *Lord's Supper*. I would be far from encouraging a rash, and unprepar'd Approach to a Sacramental Table; but I am verily perswaded, that this Ordinance has been set at too great a Distance from the other Institutions of the Gospel. And by this Means some have been tempted to neglect it, till they

they have grown into a Contempt of it, or a Humour of disputing against it; and others, till they have been quite over-power'd with Fears and Terrors about it. The Apostle says, *Let a Man examine himself, and so let him eat, &c.* And if this be seriously done according to the Word of God, and those excellent Helps, which none, that are inclined to use them, need to want, there can be no just Reason for Persons absenting themselves from the Assemblies of Communicants, any more than from that of common Worshippers. And I must add, the forsaking of *these* is in a great measure forsaking the *Christian* Assemblies, as peculiarly called such: And that we cannot be said compleatly to join with them, till we frequent this Ordinance. Which must be done as oft as we have Opportunity, upon a Return of the stated times for its Celebration.

These Things I beg you would keep in mind, as a *short Directory*, to the behaving your selves right in the assembling your selves together.

3. Let what has been said engage you to *watch against every thing*, that *might occasion your forsaking the publick Worship*. Beware of an Acediousness, and *slothful Stupidity* of Temper: Let the realizing Views of future and invisible things, keep you always wakeful and attentive. Beware of every Degree of *Spiritual Pride*; that is, of thinking that you either excel in Grace or Sense, so as to despise others, or to think your selves qualify'd to alter and over-rule the publick Worship. Beware also of *worldly Pride*, that would at any time raise Contentions and Uneasinesses about your outward Accommodations, or civil Respect in the Place of Worship. And withal beware of a timorous and *cowardly Spirit*, that would make you shrink from your Duty; and either asham'd or afraid of that

Worship, in which you acknowledge you have had a great deal of the Presence of God. Let not the Fear of Man, and of some Inconveniencies or Sufferings in the World, prevail above your Fear of God.

Here let me also caution you against that *Company* and *Conversation*, that would discourage you in your stated Worship. Some there are who have made such a Proficiency in Atheism and Prophaneness, that they take a Pride in speaking contemptibly of *all Religious Assemblies*: These I know are an Abomination to you; and need nothing more to render them such, than their own manner of Conversation and Behaviour. Others there are who have learn'd to condemn *all Assemblies but their own*; and every way of Worship, but that of a particular Party: There are Persons among us, whose Tempers may possibly give you some Trouble and Concern; but whose Reasonings are never like to afford any Light or Satisfaction. These also I would choose to avoid. The *Singularity*, which is affected on the one hand; and the *Uniformity*, which is cried up on the other, are both Enemies to the *Scriptural* and most profitable way of Worship. And I see no Bounds that can be set to either, when they are carried to such a Degree, as the Superstitious on both sides, in their Zeal against one another, contend for. I have sometimes thought the Case of the *moderate Dissenters* very hard, in having such Opposers both ways to deal with. That whilst they are cast out by those who carry the Particulars of Decency and Order too far, they are assaulted by others, who are for throwing off every thing of that kind. For my own part, I see no Reason, I am sure, whatever Men may pretend, there is no Religion in running to Extreame either way. Those are the happy Persons; those the happy

py Societies, that avoid both these: And among such I would always desire to be found.

These Differences, however, are not such as will justify Mens withdrawing from *All* our Religious Assemblies, as the manner of some is. They should hereby the rather be provok'd to enquire seriously which are most agreeable to the Word of God, and in which they may expect the most of his Presence; and according to the best Information and Light they can get, should stately join with one or other of them.

To forsake *All* is certainly to forsake a most plain and necessary *Duty*, as we have already prov'd.

And it is to forsake our own *greatest Mercy*, both with respect to Time and Eternity. Such is the real Pleasure and Satisfaction of Attendance in God's House at present, that *David* could say, *A Day in thy Courts is better than a thousand.* And when he is speaking of all his Wishes as summ'd up in one, it is this: *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the Days of my Life, to behold the Beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his Temple.* So that to forsake this, is to forsake the most valuable and desirable Blessing in the whole World.

Again, It is to forsake your chief Support in a Time of Danger and Trouble. There is nothing in the Universe a Man can look to with Hope or Comfort, in a Time of prevailing Calamities, if he is a Stranger to the Worship of God. But if we can say with the *Psalmist* in the Place just quoted, that to dwell in the House of God, to contemplate his Perfections, and enquire after our own Duty, is the prevailing Desire of our Souls, we may then add as he does there, *in the Time of Trouble he shall hide me in his Pavilion; in the Secret of his Tabernacle shall he hide me.*

Further,

Further, to forsake the Worshipping Assemblies, is to forsake that Company we shall hereafter wish to be gathered with. *Let me die the Death of the Righteous, and let my latter End be like his*, is the dying Language of some of the worst of Men. But alas! whilst Men forsake those Means that are necessary to prepare for such a Death, and for a blissful Eternity consequent thereupon, what Folly and Distraction is it to promise themselves this Happiness. To forsake the assembling of your selves together, is, in all these respects, to forsake your own greatest Mercy.

Yea, what is more, it is to draw down *Judgments* on your selves, and to aggravate your final *Condemnation* and Misery. *Temporal Judgments* do often follow upon this Departure from God, especially when despising his Worship, his Sabbaths, and solemn Assemblies, becomes a national Sin, we have abundance of Reason to fear National Calamities. The Writings of the *Prophets* are full of Threatnings of this kind: And as this is one of the *Crying Sins* of the present Age, we may well tremble for fear of God, and be afraid of his *Judgments*. Indeed we commonly see, that whilst Men forsake the Assemblies of them that worship God, they fall in with those that dishonour him, and many times are carried on to the most notorious Wickedness, and at last brought to a Prison and an ignominious Death.

But however it may fare with Men as to their present Circumstances, we are assured that such as *sin thus wilfully*, in departing from God and his Assemblies, after they have received the Knowledge of the Truth, have a certain fearful looking for, of future Judgment, and of fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries. Thus some of our best Expositors have interpreted the Words following our Text. And
undoubtedly

undoubtedly very dreadful must be the Misery and Condemnation of those, who after they have received the *Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ*, turn their Backs upon all that is sacred, and by Infidelity, or ill Lives, *trample under foot the Son of God*, and the *Blood of the Covenant*. Thus for Men to forsake the solemn Assemblies, is to bring upon themselves, sooner or later, the forest Punishment and Condemnation.

And since he that once *begins* to desert does not know where he shall *stop*; we should from these Considerations be excited to the greatest Watchfulness and Care over our selves.

To close all, let the YEAR which is beginning, as we have Opportunity, be thus improved by us. Let our *Sacred Time* be always esteem'd the most *precious* and valuable: and the *Tabernacles* of God the most *amiable* and delightful Places to us.

From these we may promise our selves the greatest *Happiness* and *Comfort*, if our *outward Peace* and *Tranquility* should be continued to us: And if *Calamities* should overtake us, yet still it will be our Interest to *fly to the Horns of the Altar*; and to take *Refuge* in the *Sanctuary*. And if *Christ* himself should come, or summon us to appear before him, by *Death*; *Blessed is that Servant whom his Lord, when he comes, shall find so doing*: That is, not forsaking the *solemn Assemblies*, as the manner of some is, but doubling our Diligence in attending upon these, the nearer we see such a Day approaching.

F I N I S.

E R R O R S.

I N the Preface, page 2d, line 7, for *their* read *our*.

In the Note, p. 8. for *incompositum* read *tricompositum*.

P. 9. l. 21. for *requires* read *enjoins*.

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==

larger Congregational Singing
& refers to discontinuance
of "lining" in this place of
worship"

f. 25

